

# City of Mesa General Plan



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**City Council Adoption – June 24, 2002**

**City Election – November 5, 2002**

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# 1.0 Introduction

The City of Mesa General Plan provides a vision and guide to the community's citizens, businesses, and officials as the community grows and develops in the future. This Introduction describes the vision for the community; summarizes the history and context of planning in Mesa; and provides a description of the purpose, preparation, and use of the General Plan.

## Mesa 2025: A Shared Vision

### Imagine...

- ... *The natural environment is used to enhance the beauty of the community*
- ... *Top-notch recreational facilities and parks dotting the community*
- ... *Exciting cultural destinations to attract residents and visitors*
- ... *High-quality educational facilities and opportunities available for children and adults of all ages*
- ... *Strong economic centers throughout Mesa that provide opportunities to live, work, and play in the same sub-area of the City*
- ... *Neighborhoods where residents genuinely care about each other, feel safe, and celebrate diversity*
- ... *A people-friendly transportation system of streets, mass transit, non-motorized vehicles, all interconnecting the business hubs and strong neighborhoods*
- ... *A well-run municipal government that provides state-of-the-art access to government services*
- ... *Homes and businesses that are well-built, aesthetically pleasing, and well-maintained*

## 1.1 The Vision of the Mesa 2025 General Plan

The vision of this General Plan is to provide for a prosperous and economically balanced community, to address the need for future housing and employment opportunities, and to support Mesa as a sustainable community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The elements of this vision are described below.



### Natural Environment, Recreation and Culture

In the future, use of Mesa's natural environment will enhance recreational opportunities through large, beautiful regional parks with a wide variety of outdoor activities. Land along the canals will be improved to provide attractive, lighted and landscaped trails. These trails will connect recreational amenities to other areas of the community and region. The Salt River offers many opportunities for providing refuge for wildlife and recreational uses. Mesa's vision includes enhancements along the Salt River to the north of the City, in conjunction with the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community.

Mesa will have a wide variety of arts and cultural amenities and a nationally recognized library system. Mesa will be a vibrant cultural center with an active downtown and many opportunities for night and day entertainment. The City will be known as a friendly, safe, well-run city with a low crime rate.

### Education as a Focus for the Future

The vision for Mesa's future includes a strong focus on education with excellent schools providing elementary to advanced levels and hubs of instruction. Mesa is a leader in education providing top notch and nationally recognized schools, including Mesa Public Schools, Arizona State University (East), Mesa Community College, Embry-Riddle University, University of North Dakota, and a number of independent college level programs.

Mesa will provide the best educational opportunities in the State of Arizona and will provide new businesses and emerging companies with a highly educated and skilled workforce. This plan envisions a continued partnership with the school districts to provide recreational facilities linked with schools and other community services. Mesa continues to be a leader in providing charter schools and alternative education opportunities for our youth.

## Strong Economic Centers or Hubs

Mesa will have sustainable economic centers located at various “hubs” throughout the City. These hubs will emphasize quality, high-paying jobs. The employment sector will offer higher than average wage scales and excellent employment security. There will be a healthy economy that will operate at the cutting edge of technology.

One of these economic hubs will be developed in the southeast portion of the planning area in the vicinity of Williams Gateway Airport. This location is considered to be part of the Williams Gateway Sub-Area, but may also be referred to as the Santan Urban Economic Hub. The area is well situated to provide a large international trade center supported by the Williams Gateway Airport. It is envisioned to become a second urban center of the City, with a mixture of residential, commercial, employment, recreational, and public uses.

Downtown Mesa is envisioned as a business hub providing governmental services, history and culture for the community. This area will have a high quality employment base.

Other economic hubs will be developed in accordance with the characteristics described in the General Plan and the Economic Development Strategy. Each of the economic centers or hubs will allow residents of the City to work and play within fifteen minutes from their homes.

## An Involved and Caring Community

Mesa will provide an atmosphere that is oriented toward the family and provides a strong sense of place. Citizens will be encouraged to share values, vote, take care of one another and their environment, and celebrate diversity. It is important that all cultural groups are actively involved in planning efforts for the future of our community. This vision recognizes, accepts and promotes diversity in public involvement and educational opportunities for all.

## A People-Friendly Transportation System

Mesa's future will boast people-friendly transportation options. The City will strive to resolve problems created by traffic congestion. This vision includes alternatives to automobile transportation providing a wide variety of bus, light rail, bicycle, commuter rail, and air travel opportunities.

In conjunction with the people friendly transportation systems in the urbanized core of Mesa, it is envisioned that the downtown area will reveal a renaissance of opportunities. These opportunities will be supported by an ambiance created by a modern light rail system and pedestrian amenities.

## Well Run City and Quality Built Environment

Mesa will have one of the best-run municipal governments in the State, providing efficient, modern, and user-friendly services. Environmental issues will be addressed and Mesa will be known as a clean city with virtually no pollution. The City will support clean air efforts, telework, promoting workers to live close to their workplaces, and provide excellent mass transportation choices.

Mesa will have a quality built environment, with beautiful natural desert amenities, historic places, and excellent and pleasing architectural character. Commercial and residential developments may be designed in a park-like atmosphere. Innovative urban design supporting the idea of live work and play in one area will be encouraged. Neighborhoods will be well maintained and provide housing in all price ranges and full-spectrum shopping. Mesa will maintain and revitalize its older residential neighborhoods and provide opportunities for quality commercial and mixed-use areas, which may focus on a variety of "small town centers".

## 1.2 History and Context

### 1.2.1 Historical Growth of the City

Since its incorporation over 100 years ago, the City of Mesa has experienced tremendous growth. Today it remains primed for further growth in size, population, and employment.

The history of Mesa extends back to the Hohokam Indians, the "Departed Ones," who built the original canal system in the Valley. Mesa's modern history began in 1877 when a group of Mormon colonists arrived in Lehi and built Fort Utah near the present day intersection of Lehi and Horne Roads. In 1878, a second group of Mormon colonists arrived and established what became modern-day Mesa by registering the square mile bounded by the present day Mesa Drive, Country Club, University, and Broadway Roads. In 1883, the City of Mesa was officially incorporated and had an estimated 200 residents.

Almost fifty years later, in 1930, the City's area had expanded to approximately 2.3 square miles and the population had increased to 3,711. Mesa's area and population increased rapidly thereafter. By 1960, Mesa's area was over 15 square miles and the population was nearly 34,000, concentrated near the historic city center. By 1980, however, the City boundaries had expanded significantly, increasing the City's area to over 66 square miles, and the population had increased to over 152,000.

Most recently, in 2000, the City's area and population had doubled to over 128 square miles and more than 396,000 residents. Similarly, the number of non-agricultural employees in Mesa increased to approximately 249,000 in 2000, up from 151,000 in 1990.

## 1.2.2 History of Planning in Mesa

The first general plan for Mesa was adopted by the City Council in December 1971. Officially called the Mesa 1990 General Plan, it served well during a period of rapid growth.

The City of Mesa experienced a rapid rate of growth during the decade of the 1970's. A number of planning studies were completed during this time to supplement the Mesa 1990 General Plan. These studies considered the areas of land use, transportation, storm water, utilities, housing, and airports. As a result of these studies, and in response to the substantial development in Mesa, a new general plan was prepared and adopted in 1982.

During the mid-1980's, Mesa continued to experience significant population and area growth. New local and regional issues arose, including freeway planning, environmental constraints, economic development, downtown redevelopment, neighborhood preservation, and utility system expansion. A major study of local economic development strategies and land use plans related to the newly-approved regional freeway system was conducted. This study resulted in the Mesa Freeway Corridors Study report, completed in 1988, which developed land use plans for a one-to-two-mile-wide corridor along existing and planned freeway alignments.

The Mesa Freeway Corridors Study was used as the basis for a 1988 update of the 1982 General Plan. This updated plan focused on policies that reflected the consensus of the City Council and the community. These policies were intended to guide major land use and community development decisions. References were made in the plan to other important studies that identified objectives and policies for the City.

After 1988, the City conducted a number of major planning studies to address various aspects of urban development. In 1996, an updated General Plan was prepared. The 1996 General Plan emphasized goals, objectives, and policies. The basic philosophy of the plan was to provide a decision-making framework for the overall planning process.

## 1.3 City Government

The City of Mesa has an elected Mayor and six City Council members that are limited to two consecutive terms. The City operates under a charter form of government, with the Mayor and City Council setting policy. In 1998, a voter initiative changed the election of the council members from an at-large system to a system of six districts. Council members serve a term of four years, with three members elected every two years. The mayor is elected at-large every four years.

The Mesa City Council actively encourages citizen participation in the decision-making process. This citizen involvement is accomplished through neighborhood meetings, advisory boards and committees, and other means. Based on the citizen input, the Council sets policies for the operation and development of the City. The appointed boards and committees play a major role in this process.

The citizen groups that have a particular relationship to the preparation of the General Plan include the Planning and Zoning Board, Transportation Advisory Board, Parks and Recreation Board, and Economic Development Advisory Board.

Other groups that play an important role in decisions affecting the community include the Board of Adjustment, Building Board of Appeals, Design Review Board, Downtown Development Committee, Electrical Advisory Board, Historic Preservation Committee, Housing and Human Services Advisory Board, Human Relations Advisory Board, Industrial Development Authority, Judicial Advisory Board, Library Advisory Board, Museum and Cultural Advisory Board, and Plumbing Mechanical and Solar Energy Advisory Board.

Supporting the elected and appointed leaders is a City staff of over 3,500 full-time equivalent employees. The City's leaders and staff strive to improve the quality of life and sustainability of Mesa by developing and enforcing policies related to the City's growth and development. They also enable community residents and businesses to express their opinions and gain representation via elections, public meetings, and direct contact.

The City of Mesa provides a wide range of services to meet the needs of the citizens and businesses located in Mesa, including roadways; gas, water, and electric utilities; police; fire; courts; libraries; solid waste disposal; parks and recreation facilities; arts and cultural programs; and transit. These services significantly improve the quality of life for residents and competitiveness for businesses. Furthermore, they are not generally provided by the private sector, making it incumbent upon the City to ensure their safe and efficient availability.

To provide these services, the City of Mesa draws upon a wide array of revenue sources and makes numerous expenditures. While most of this revenue is from local sources, such as sales taxes, utility charges, and user fees, a large proportion also comes from external sources, such as intergovernmental transfers from the State of Arizona. It is critical to the economic well-being of the community that the City's revenues and expenditures are kept in balance. Through careful planning and budgeting, the City has functioned efficiently since 1941 without a property tax.

## 1.4 Purpose of the General Plan

Arizona state law (ARS 9-461.05.A) requires that each city adopt a comprehensive, long-range general plan to guide the physical development of



the community. The Mesa City Charter also requires the existence of a general plan. The Mesa General Plan has the following three interrelated functions:

- An expression of community goals and priorities
- A decision making guide
- A fulfillment of a legal requirement of state law

While the Mesa General Plan responds to the legal requirements of the Arizona statutes, it is designed to be specific to the issues and needs of Mesa. It contains goals, objectives, and policies to guide the community over a 25-year period. Its focus is on shaping the physical form of the City, yet it also includes policies and statements about other aspects of the community.

Misconceptions sometimes exist with regard to the purpose and use of a general plan. Clarifications of several such items include the following.

- One misconception is that the general plan cannot be changed over time and that all of the policies and strategies will be implemented exactly as written. However, the plan is a general guideline that may be updated or changed if needed, depending on how growth actually occurs over time. The plan will be evaluated periodically and updated to respond to the changing needs of the community.
- Another misconception is that the general plan is the same as the zoning ordinance. In reality, these are two separate documents with different purposes. The general plan is a policy document that guides community growth and development decisions. The zoning ordinance, with its associated zoning maps, implements the General Plan. It is a legal instrument that precisely defines permitted land uses and associated performance standards for individual properties. The important relationship between the two is that zoning amendments must conform to the generalized policies of the plan. A common misconception is that the general plan is only the land use map. While this map is the focal point of many development decisions, the relationship with other concerns is critical to sound decisions. These concerns include transportation, public facilities, the environment, economic development, and other topics. The elements of the general plan provide guidance for decisions that will take into account the interrelationships among these issues.

The following lists summarize what a general plan is and what it is not.

Mesa's General Plan is:

- A statement of city policy
- A guide for decision making
- A framework for more specific planning
- A tool for education and communication



- A means of providing a long-range perspective
- A way to improve the quality of life

Mesa's General Plan is not:

- A specific plan for a development project
- A zoning ordinance
- A rigid static document
- A capital improvement plan
- A city budget
- A master plan or operational plan

## 1.5 Preparation of the General Plan

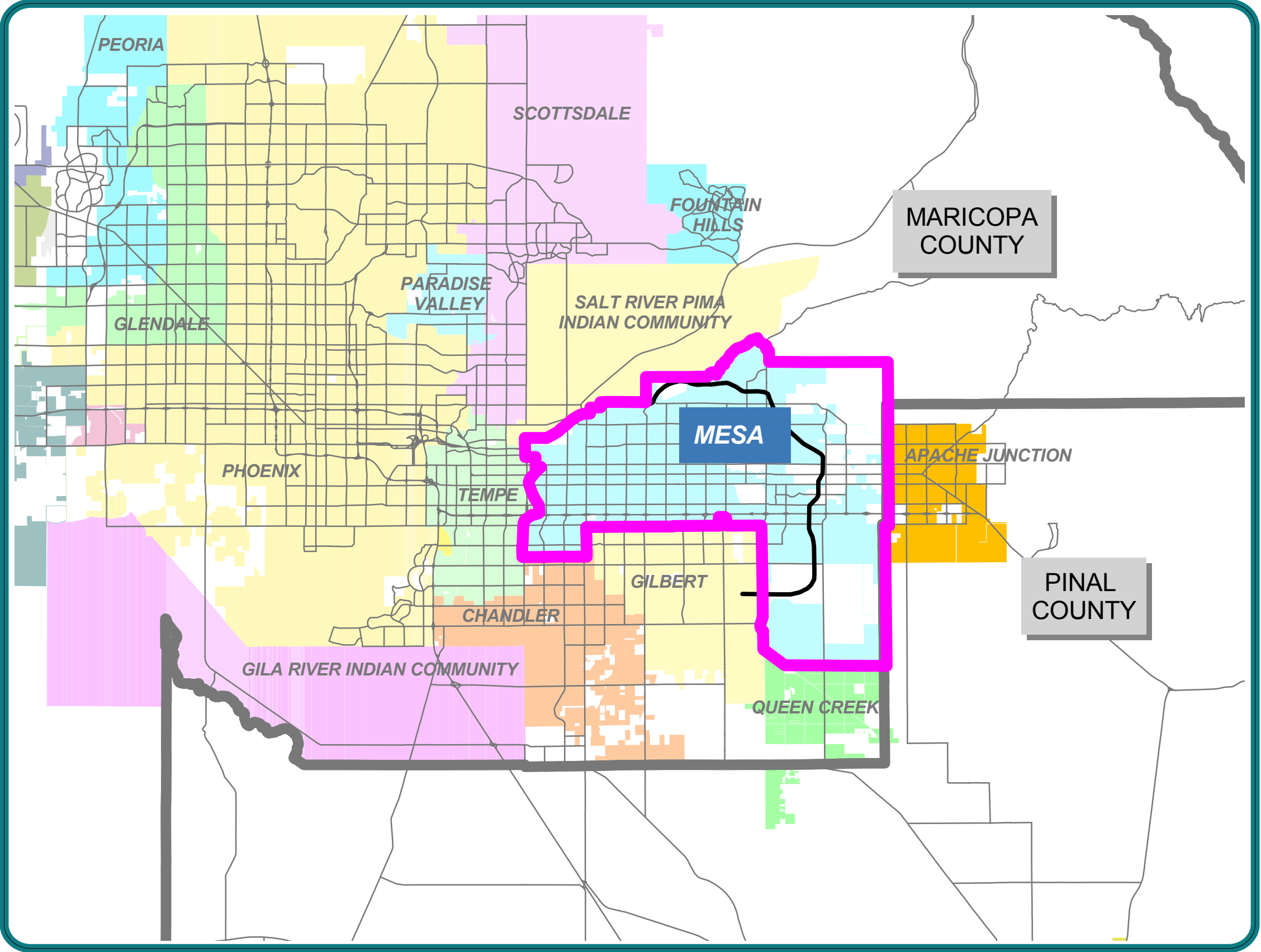
The general plan is intended to provide a comprehensive guide to the community's present and future residents and businesses as well as city leaders and staff regarding future growth and development goals. It applies to all land within the planning area and addresses subjects related to the community's development. The General Plan also specifies the objectives, policies and implementation measures required to achieve the community's goals.



A number of factors signaled the need to update the General Plan since its most recent adoption in 1996. Chief among these was the approval by the State of Arizona of legislation known as Growing Smarter (1998) and Growing Smarter Plus (2000). This legislation requires cities in Arizona to adopt or substantially revise their general plans. It also requires the City Council to approve the General Plan and to submit it to the citizens for a public vote. In addition, the City's continued strong population growth and the number of development opportunities have made it appropriate to update the General Plan.

The City of Mesa is an important part of the Phoenix Metropolitan Area. The relationship of Mesa to this urban area and the surrounding communities is illustrated on Figure 1-1. This General Plan covers an area somewhat larger than the City's incorporated limits, as shown on Figure 1-2. This Municipal Planning Area accounts for the fact that the City of Mesa's sphere of influence extends beyond its boundaries, particularly into areas that currently are primarily under the jurisdiction of Maricopa County. The Mesa Municipal Planning Area is generally bounded by the Salt River on the north, Baseline Road or Germann Road on the south, the Loop 101 Freeway on the west, and Meridian Road on the east. The City's incorporated area covers 128 square miles. Unincorporated areas collectively comprise approximately 44 square miles, creating a total planning area of nearly 172 square miles.

Regional Context

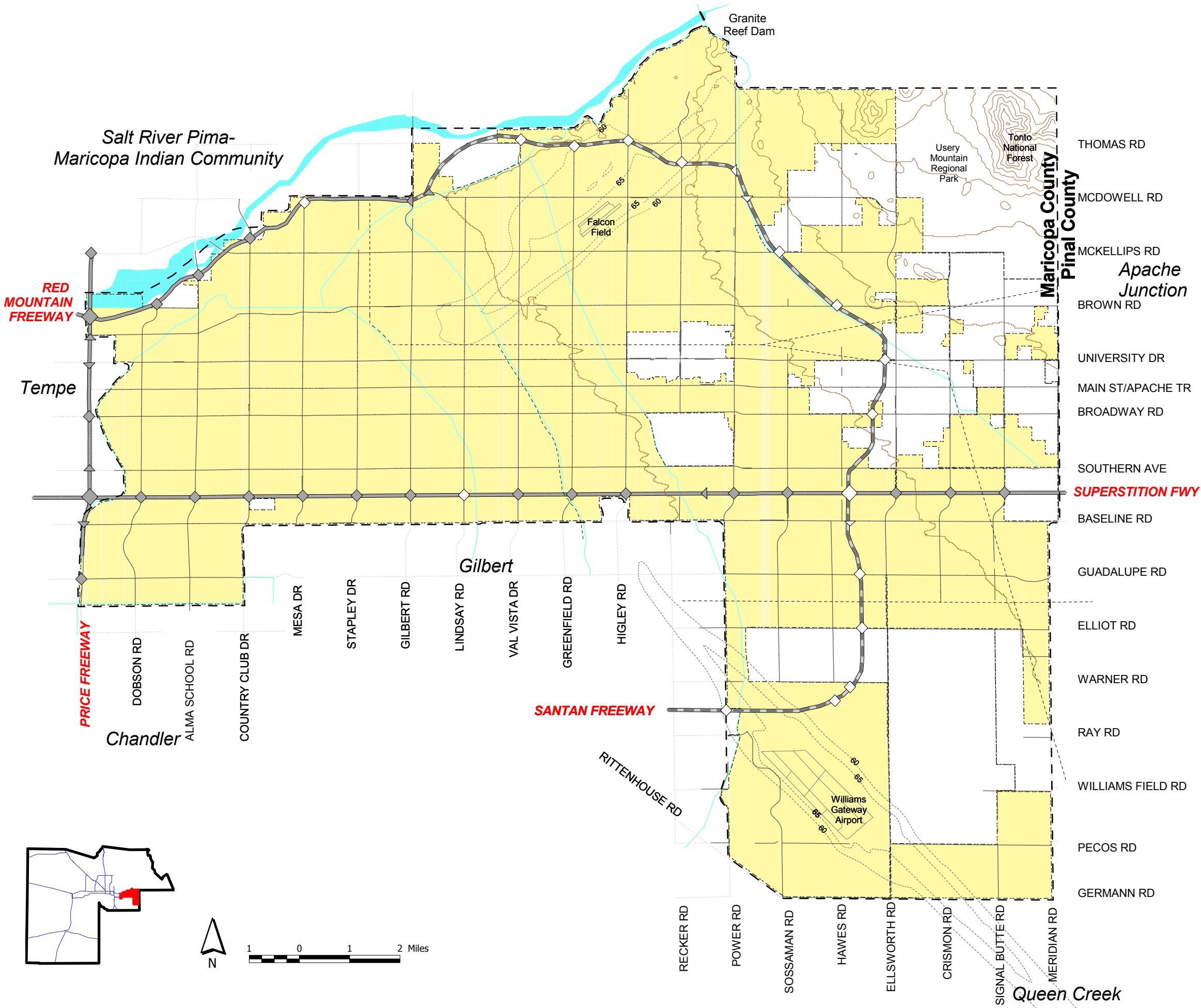
Figure 1-1









-  Mesa Municipal Planning Area
-  County Boundary

Municipal Planning Area

Figure 1-2



 Municipal Planning Area  
City Limit

-  Freeway
-  Interchange
-  Future Freeway
-  Future Interchange
-  Arterial Roadway
-  Canals and Waterways
-  Aviation Noise Contours
-  Overhead Transmission Lines
-  Planning Area Boundary



In addition to the General Plan, the Mesa 2025 planning process also includes the preparation of the three more specific plans listed below. The General Plan includes elements that pertain to these three subjects. The respective individual master plans will provide additional details.

- Transportation Master Plan – Defines objectives, policies, and actions for the transportation system, including streets, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians.
- Parks and Recreation Master Plan – Sets objectives and policies for the park system and recreational programs.
- Economic Development Strategy– Defines objectives, policies, and strategies for the economic growth, development, and preservation of the community.

The Mayor and City Council appointed a 31-member citizen committee to provide general guidance in the preparation of the four plans. This Joint Master Planning Committee considered broad policy issues, supervised the public involvement process, and made recommendation to the City Council. Subcommittees were created for the General Plan, Transportation Plan, Parks and Recreation Plan, and Economic Development Plan. Each subcommittee addressed its respective plan in a comprehensive manner and forwarded its findings and recommendations to the full committee.

An extensive public involvement program was also undertaken to gather the views of the citizens of Mesa. At the center of the program were public open houses held in each of the six City Council districts to present information to the citizens and to gather their opinions during each phase of the planning process. The program also involved public surveys, a stakeholders meeting, newsletters, mailings, a web page, and interviews. Two planning and zoning public hearings and two City Council meetings were scheduled to hear citizen input and consider this plan.

## 1.6 Organization and Use of the General Plan

The remainder of the General Plan is divided into the 12 functional sections or elements listed below. These elements are required by the Growing Smarter (1998) and Growing Smarter Plus (2000) legislation. In some cases, the elements as defined by the statute are combined as indicated.

1. Land Use
2. Transportation (Combines circulation element and bicycle element.)
3. Economic Development
4. Growth Areas
5. Revitalization and Redevelopment
6. Housing

7. Public Facilities, Buildings, and Services (Combines public buildings element and public facilities and services element.)
8. Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (Combines open space element and recreation element.)
9. Environmental Planning/Conservation (Combines environmental planning element and conservation element.)
10. Water Resources
11. Cost of Development
12. Safety

Each element of the Mesa General Plan is organized into the following sections:

- Background
- Goals, Objectives, and Policies
- Plan Components

The Background describes historical and existing conditions and provides the general basis for the other sections of the element.

The Goals, Objectives, and Policies are used to guide decisions that affect the future of the City. The following definitions explain these terms in more detail and highlight their increasingly specific nature:

- **Goal:** A goal is a brief statement describing a desired target or end condition at which planning is directed. Goals are generally not measurable or time dependent, and do not describe specific steps necessary for achievement.
- **Objective:** An objective is an intermediate step towards attaining a goal. Objectives should be measurable, time dependent, and achievable.
- **Policy:** A policy is a clear statement guiding decision-making. Policies should be unambiguous, support the relevant goals and objectives, and be based on facts.

The Plan Components describe further details related to the goals, objectives and policies and are intended to facilitate their achievement.

These elements of the General Plan provide guidance for future growth and development of the community in both verbal and graphic form. These provisions will be effective only if the plan is properly administered and implemented. Provision must also be made for appropriate amendments. In addition, the General Plan will need to be updated as significant changes occur in the physical, economic, and political environment of the City of Mesa. These updates should reflect the latest demographic data available from the U.S. Census every five to ten years. At a minimum, the General Plan must be updated within ten years to comply with Arizona Revised Statutes.

Section 14.0 of the General Plan describes the manner in which the plan will be administered. This section contains the following three items:

- Plan Implementation – Tools and strategies that will be used to ensure that the goals, objectives, and policies described in the elements will be achieved.
- Plan Amendments – Procedures for amending the General Plan as required by state law.
- Plan Updates – Description of the need for periodic updates to the General Plan.